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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5575

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL PESHAWAR IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1405

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 1353

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PROP, MCPS, UR, AF

SUBJECT: SOVIET "WITHDRAWAL" ACTIVITIES AT SHINDAND

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: A JOURNALIST WHO OBSERVED THE "WITHDRAWAL" OF A SOVIET TANK REGIMENT AT SHINDAND DESCRIBED IT AS A BADLY ORGANIZED SPECTACLE. THE TANK REGIMENT INCLUDED MANY OLD MODEL TANKS. SOVIET TROOPS TO BE WITHDRAWN WERE MOSTLY YOUNG, CENTRAL ASIANS WHO CLAIMED NOT TO HAVE SEEN COMBAT. END SUMMARY.

3. [REDACTED] JOURNALIST WHO WAS PART OF THE LARGE GROUP OF WESTERN AND BLOC JOURNALISTS WHO WENT TO SHINDAND TO OBSERVE WITHDRAWAL OF A TANK REGIMENT ON OCTOBER 15, DESCRIBED THE EVENT AS A BADLY ORGANIZED "SPECTACLE." FOUR AN-26'S BROUGHT JOURNALISTS TO THE SITE OVER A CIRCUITOUS ROUTE THAT LOOPED SOUTHWARD OVER

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LASHKARGAR. ON DEPARTURE FROM KABUL AND ON LANDING AT SHINDAND EACH OF THE JOURNALISTS' AIRCRAFT WERE ESCORTED BY FOUR MI-24'S DISPENSING FLARES. SECURITY, EVEN AT THE SOVIET BASE, WAS VERY TIGHT.

4. OUR JOURNALIST SOURCE CLAIMS TO HAVE SEEN 94 T-54'S AND T-55'S (TV COVERAGE APPEARED TO SHOW T-52'S - VICE T-54'S, THOUGH ONLY BRIEF GLIMPSES OF TANKS WERE SEEN.). BECAUSE OF BLOWING DUST IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE VEHICLES HAD BEEN SCRUBBED UP. MANY OF THE TANKS (NOTABLY THE OLD MODEL T-55'S) DID SHOW SIGNS OF WEAR.

5. JOURNALISTS WERE INVITED TO SPEAK WITH SELECTED SOVIET TROOPS AMONG THOSE DEPARTING. OUR SOURCE, [REDACTED] NOTED THAT THE TROOPS HE SPOKE WITH WERE OBVIOUSLY REHEARSED FOR THE CONTACT WITH JOURNALISTS BUT THAT MANY NERVOUSLY LOOKED TO SENIORS FOR PROMPTING.

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[REDACTED]

SOURCE ESTIMATED THAT APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE TROOPS WERE CENTRAL ASIAN AND ALL VERY YOUNG.

6: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] BECAUSE OF CONFUSION ARISING FROM DELAYED PLANES AND OTHER SCHEDULE PROBLEMS, JOURNALISTS WERE ACTUALLY ABLE TO MIX WITH SENIOR SOVIET MILITARY

[REDACTED]

AND DRA LEADERS.

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7. THE DELEGATION WAS OBSERVED DEPARTING THE CITY OF KABUL FOR KABUL AIRPORT AT 0530 ON OCTOBER 15 UNDER THE HEAVY SECURITY THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED THE VISIT.

JOURNALISTS REMAIN UNSURE ABOUT THEIR SCHEDULE FOR THE REST OF THE WEEK. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE APPROXIMATELY 142 JOURNALISTS (INCLUDING BLOC REPS) WILL BE DIVIDED TO COVER EVENTS IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS. SOME JOURNALISTS EXPECT TO COVER A CEREMONY IN KABUL, POSSIBLY AT OR NEAR KABUL AIRPORT, OCTOBER 16. WE NOTE THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME ROADWORK DONE AT THE SOUTHERN TERMINUS OF THE SALANG ROAD, SUGGESTING SOME CEREMONIAL ACTIVITY IN THAT AREA. BALUM

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